THE NEWS —Office For— JOB WORK

Canyon City News.

ADVERTISE —It In— THE NEWS

VOL VIII. CANYON CITY, RANDALL CO., TEXAS, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1904. NO. 40.

The Blazed Trail

By STEWART EDWARD WHITE

Toward the end of the week he received his first visit. Evening was drawing on. Thorpe was busily engaged in cooking a panful of trout. Suddenly he became aware of a presence at his side.

"How do?" greeted the newcomer gravely.

The man was an Indian, silent, solemn, with the straight, unwinking gaze of his race.

"How do?" replied Thorpe.

The Indian without further ceremony threw his pack to the ground, and, squatting on his heels, watched the white man's preparations. When the meal was cooked he coolly produced a knife, selected a clean bit of hemlock bark and helped himself. Then he lit a pipe and gazed keenly about him.

"What you do?" he inquired after a long silence, punctuated by the puffs of tobacco.

"Hunt, trap, fish," replied Thorpe, with equal sententiousness.

"Good," concluded the Indian after a ruminative pause.

That night he slept on the ground. Next day he made a better shelter than

"How do?" greeted the newcomer.

Thorpe's in less than half the time and was off hunting before the sun was an hour high. He was armed with an old fashioned smooth bore muzzle loader, and Thorpe was astonished after he had become better acquainted with his new companion's method to find that he hunted deer with fine bird shot. The Indian never expected to kill or even mortally wound his game, but he would follow for miles the blood drops caused by his little wounds until the animals in sheer exhaustion allowed him to approach close enough for a dispatching blow. At 2 o'clock he returned with a small buck, tied scientifically together for toting, with the waste parts cut away, but every ounce of utility retained.

"I show," said the Indian, and he did. Thorpe learned the Indian tan.

The India appeared to intend making the birch knoll his permanent headquarters. Thorpe was at first a little suspicious of his new companion, but the man appeared scrupulously honest, was never intrusive and even seemed genuinely desirous of teaching the white little tricks of the woods brought to their perfection by the Indian alone. He ended by liking him. The two rarely spoke. They merely sat near each other and smoked. One evening the Indian suddenly remarked:

"You look 'um tree?"

"What's that?" cried Thorpe, startled.

"You no hunter, no trapper. You look 'um tree for make 'um lumber."

"What makes you think that, Charley?" he asked.

"You good man in woods," replied Injun Charley sententiously. "I tell by way you look at him pine."

Thorpe ruminated.

"Charley," said he, "why are you staying here with me?"

"Big frien'," replied the Indian promptly.

"Why are you my friend? What have I ever done for you?"

"You got 'um chief's eye," replied his companion, with simplicity.

Thorpe looked at the Indian again. There seemed to be only one course.

"Yes, I'm a lumberman," he confessed, "and I'm looking for pine. But, Charley, the men up the river must not know what I'm after."

"They get 'um pine," interjected the Indian like a flash.

"Exactly," replied Thorpe, surprised afresh at the other's perspicacity.

"Good!" exclaimed Injun Charley and fell silent.

With this, the longest conversation the two had attempted in their peculiar acquaintance, Thorpe was forced to be content.

Three days later he was intensely thankful the conversation had taken place.

After the noon meal he lay on his blanket under the hemlock shelter, smoking and lazily watching Injun Charley busy over the making of a birch bark canoe.

So idly intent was Thorpe on this piece of construction that he did not notice the approach of two men from the down stream side. They were short, alert men, plodding along with the knee-bent persistency of the wood walker, dressed in broad hats, flannel shirts, coarse trousers tucked in high laced "cruisers" and carrying each a bulging meal sack looped by a cord across the shoulders and chest. Both were armed with long slender scalers' rules. The first intimation Thorpe received of the presence of these two men was the sound of their voices.

"Hello, Charley!" said one of them. "What you doing here? Ain't seen you since the Sturgeon district."

"Mak' 'um canoe," replied Charley rather obviously.

"So I see. But what do you expect to get in this God forsaken country?"

"Beaver, muskrat, mink, otter."

"Trapping, eh?" the man gazed keenly at Thorpe's recumbent figure. "Who's the other fellow?"

Thorpe held his breath, then exhaled it in a long sigh of relief.

"Him white man," Injun Charley was replying. "Him hunt too. He mak' 'um buckskin."

The land looker arose lazily and sauntered toward the group.

"Howdy?" he drawled. "Got any smokin'?"

"How are you?" replied one of the scalers, eying him sharply and tendering his pouch. Thorpe filled his pipe deliberately and returned it with a heavy lidded glance of thanks. To all appearances he was one of the lazy, shiftless hunters of the backwoods. Seized with an inspiration, he said: "What sort of chances is they at your camp for a little flour? Me and Charley's about out. I'll bring you meat, or I'll make you boys moccasins. I got some good buckskin."

It was the usual proposition.

"Pretty good, I guess. Come up and see," advised the scaler. "The crew's right behind us."

"I'll send Charley," drawled Thorpe. "I'm busy now makin' traps." He waved his pipe, calling attention to the pine and rawhide deadfalls.

They chatted a few moments. Then two wagons creaked lurching by, followed by fifteen or twenty men. The last of these, evidently the foreman, was joined by the two scalers.

Injun Charley was setting about the splitting of a cedar log.

"You see," he remarked. "I big frien'."

In the days that followed Thorpe cruised about the great woods. It was slow business, but fascinating. He knew that when he should embark on his attempt to enlist considerable capital in an "unsight, unseen" investment he would have to be well supplied with statistics.

First of all he walked over the country at large to find where the best timber lay. This was a matter of tramping, though often on an elevation he succeeded in climbing a tall tree whence he caught birdseye views of the country at large. He always carried his gun with him and was prepared at a moment's notice to seem engaged in hunting.

Next he ascertained the geographical location of the different clumps and forests, entering the sections, the quarter sections, even the separate forties, in his notebook, taking in only the "descriptions" containing the best pine.

Finally he wrote accurate notes concerning the topography of each and every pine district—the lay of the land, the hills, ravines, swamps and valleys, the distance from the river, the character of the soil. In short, he accumulated all the information he could by which the cost of logging might be estimated.

For this he had really too little experience. He knew it, but determined to do his best. The weak point of his whole scheme lay in that it was going to be impossible for him to allow the prospective purchaser a chance to examine the pine. That difficulty Thorpe hoped to overcome by inspiring personal confidence in himself. If he failed to do so he might return with a land looker whom the investor trusted, and the two could re-enact the comedy of this summer. Thorpe hoped, however, to avoid the necessity. He set about a rough estimate of the timber.

One evening just at sunset Thorpe was helping the Indian shape his craft. The two men bent there at their task, the dull glow of evening falling upon them. Behind them the knoll stood out in picturesque relief against the darker pines. The river rushed by with a never ending roar and turmoil. Through its shouting one perceived, as through a mist, the still lofty peace of evening.

A young fellow, hardly more than a boy, exclaimed with keen delight of the picturesque as his canoe shot around the bend into sight of it.

The canoe was large and powerful, but well filled. An Indian knelt in the stern. Amidships was well laden with duffle of all descriptions. The young fellow sat in the bow. He was a bright faced, eager eyed, curly haired young fellow, all enthusiasm and fire. His figure was trim and clean, but rather slender, and his movements were quick, but nervous. When he stepped carefully out on the flat rock to which his guide brought the canoe with a swirl of the paddle one initiated would have seen that his clothes, while strong and serviceable, had been bought from a sporting catalogue.

"This is a good place," he said to the guide. "We'll camp here." Then he turned up the steep bank without looking back.

"Hello!" he called in a cheerful, unembarrassed fashion to Thorpe and Charley. "How are you? Care if I camp here? What you making? By Jove! I never saw a canoe made before. I'm going to watch you. Keep right at it."

He sat on one of the outcropping bowlders and took off his hat.

"Say, you've got a great place here! You here all summer? Hello! You've got a deer hanging up. Are there many of 'em around here? I'd like to kill a deer first rate. I never have. It's sort of out of season now, isn't it?"

"We only kill the bucks," replied Thorpe.

"I like fishing too," went on the boy. "Are there any here? In the pool? John," he called to his guide, "bring me my fishing tackle."

In a few moments he was whipping the pool with long, graceful drops of the fly. He proved to be adept. At first the Indian's stolid countenance seemed a trifle doubtful. After a time it cleared.

"Good!" he grunted.

The other Indian had now finished the erection of a tent and had begun to cook supper over a little sheet iron camp stove. Thorpe and Charley could smell ham.

"You've got quite a pantry," remarked Thorpe.

"Won't you eat with me?" proffered the boy hospitably.

But Thorpe declined.

In the course of the evening the boy approached the older men's camp and, with charming diffidence, asked permission to sit awhile at their fire.

"It must be good to live in the woods," he said with a sigh, "to do all things for yourself. It's so free."

"I just do love this!" he cried again and again. "Oh, it's great, after all that fuss down there!" And he cried it so fervently that the other men present smiled, but so genuinely that the smile had in it nothing but kindliness.

"I came out for a month," said he suddenly, "and I guess I'll stay the rest of it right here. You'll let me go with you sometimes hunting, won't you? I'd like first rate to kill a deer."

"Sure," said Thorpe. "Glad to have you."

"My name is Wallace Carpenter," said the boy, with a sudden unmistakable air of good breeding.

"Well," laughed Thorpe, "two old woods loafers like us haven't got much use for names. Charley here is called Geezigut, and mine's nearly as bad, but I guess plain Charley and Harry will do."

CHAPTER XI.

THE young fellow stayed three weeks and was a constant joy to Thorpe. Thorpe liked the boy because he was open hearted, free from affectation, assumptive of no superiority—in short, because he was direct and sincere. Wallace, on his part, adored in Thorpe the free, open air life, the adventurous quality, the quiet, hidden power, the resourcefulness and the self sufficiency of the pioneer. He did anything at all. He accepted Thorpe for what he thought him to be rather than for what he might think him to be.

Little by little the eager questions of the youth extracted a full statement

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